

*Slip: A Venture In Children's Literature*

**An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)**

by

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### Abstract

This honors creative project is centered on the creation of a children's chapter book, titled *Slip*. The Author's Statement details the process of writing, editing, and publishing the book, as well as creating the artifacts to accompany the work. The project of creating *Slip* is, as titled, a venture into children's literature (a sub-genre previously unfamiliar to me). The experience of writing a children's book is quite different from that of other forms of writing, even other fiction. A children's book demands greater consideration of language and plot structure, while maintaining a depth of character and story. Through the process of writing *Slip* I have overcome many challenges and learned many new perspectives on creative writing and, indeed, literature as a whole. The end product is a self-published children's book with a cover of my own design and an accompanying website.

### Acknowledgements

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From the beginning I knew I wanted to write a story as my thesis project. I have been writing creatively since I learned how to write. In the last few years I have finished multiple works of fiction, most of which are young adult novels. Some of my smaller works I have self-published online, and others I plan to use to explore the greater publishing industry. My mind is continually full of stories, of the unimaginable and the imagined. To me, creative writing is the ultimate form of expression. Thus, when I considered what I might create for my thesis, a book was the first thing that came to mind.

However, despite my confidence from the beginning as to the form my thesis should take, I still only had a nebulous idea at best as to what my story would actually *be*. Being an Elementary Education major, I thought it would be apropos to write a book geared towards elementary school-aged children. This was something I had never done. My fictional work in the past had always been geared towards older audiences, teenagers and pre-teens at the very youngest. I had always aspired to create novels, long works of fiction. If I were going to write a children's book, likely only a chapter book at the longest, I was going to have to attempt something I had never done before. Thus I took it as a challenge, and set about writing my first-ever children's book.

This was easier said than done. For one thing, while I had the form and audience in mind for the book, I did not yet have a story to write. I mulled over quite a few options, storylines and characters I had considered in the past, but none seemed to fit. I wanted this story to be completely new, to match the new form of literature I was branching into. Unfortunately, that meant I was starting from scratch. Already I knew that this book would not, could not, be like my others. Children's books do not sacrifice story for length, but they are shorter and simpler in their plots. They must maintain compelling characters and

plotlines while simultaneously keeping the story and concepts at a level that children in a range of development can understand. It's a balance I was driven to find, but I knew it would require an effective story concept.

I ended up brainstorming with some friends, seeking help in finding a story or a concept that I would enjoy writing a shorter story about. We discussed many options, until one of my friends suggested that I write about something I was familiar with. She pointed out that I have been to a number of interesting places, and that surely I could draw inspiration from one of them. Immediately an idea came to mind of the Renaissance Festival. It more than anyplace else seemed like a fantastical intrusion into the real world, and was a place which had excited my imagination as a child. I could only envision it providing a vivid setting for my children's book as well, encouraging the creativity of other children. The more I thought the more defined the idea became, of a Renaissance Festival where all the make-believe and fantastical imaginings were actually real in some way.

This setting did not come from nowhere, nor was it just a memory from my childhood which I drew upon. As my friend suggested, the Renaissance Festival is a place I am intimately familiar with. For the last three summers I have worked at the Colorado Renaissance Festival serving food. My job description involves putting on a costume as well as an accent, and during my time there I have met a diverse group of people from all over the country. Working at the Renaissance Festival is, of course, quite different from simply attending one, and my experiences as an employee at such an entertainment establishment have given me a unique perspective on the Renaissance Festival and other events like it. I have drawn on both my childhood memories and my more recent practical experience to provide a detailed and compelling setting for the book; hopefully, one that will share with

the audience the wonder of being a child at such a Festival as well as the “behind the scenes” reality of working at one.

The idea for the story eventually became fully developed, and it did so before I had written a single word. I created the concept of a Renaissance Faire that is actually two, one like the real-life Festival I work at, and the other identical, save that everything that should be fake – magic, knights, fairies, and the like – is actually real. It was a concept I found intriguing and which I knew I would have adored as a child. The idea that the real world can be hiding magic is wholly appealing to children. I wanted to create a story that would inspire children and excite their imaginations, and this certainly seemed like the story with which I could attempt that lofty goal.

This duality of worlds was eventually populated with characters. Alex, from whose perspective the book is written, is a boy going into the fifth grade. He is at a point between childhood and adolescence, a time where the wonder of magic is still appealing while, at the same time, he wants to be a helpful and mature part of reality. This is a transition that all children, and even some adults, struggle with, and is an inherently relatable characteristic to have in a protagonist. Alex meets many friends, both in the real-world Faire as well as the one in which magic is real. These people – the fairgoers, the “rennies”, the shopkeepers, the tourists, and even the entertainers – are all drawn from the real people I have met while working at the Colorado Renaissance Festival. The Festival has a subculture of its own and I strove to give the reader a sense of what it is like.

One other major character is Julia, Alex’s mom. His mother is a huge influence in his life, and their relationship is a key part of the book. Having read and examined a great deal of children’s literature, especially in the fantasy genre, it has always struck me as odd and



somewhat unrealistic that the parents are almost always removed from the story. In most books this is a simple mechanism, a device to allow the children to undertake the problems and challenges of the plot without help, allowing them to grow; and for the children who read the books to feel that adventure can be found regardless of what the adults in their lives might say. However, I find this unnecessary in every story. There are plenty of children who live in caring families, and whose parents would worry about them if they suddenly disappeared from the world to fight evil. As ridiculous as that might sound, I have always wanted to write a children's book where the child protagonist trusts their parent and cares about them, and goes to them for help even if they can't say exactly what it is they are struggling with. I feel that this healthy parent-child relationship is underrepresented in the literature, and with this story I wanted to take a step towards remedying that deficiency.

With these big-picture ideas in mind, and many idealistic goals I was not sure I could portray through my writing to the extent and skill that I might wish, I began this project. Unlike in previous novels, I didn't simply sit down and start writing, as much as I might have liked to. Because I was doing a chapter book, and because that meant it needed to be shorter than my usual work as well as have a complete plot arc in that time, I first sat down to write an outline. This was something completely new- never before had I planned a story in its entirety before writing it, especially not to the extent with which I did this book, now titled *Slip*. However, I thought the planning process would be necessary in order to create a product I would be proud of in an unfamiliar literary sub-genre. So I planned out each chapter, writing in some detail about what would happen and the key events that would

play into the plot later. Only once I had everything completely figured out, and a satisfactory climax planned, did I begin writing the first draft.

I wrote most of the first draft (approximately seven and a half chapters out of ten) in a month. This was because of Camp NaNoWriMo. NaNoWriMo, or National Novel Writing Month, is an international event in the month of November in which participants are challenged to write 50,000 words (a full novel) in 30 days. I have been a participant of this program for the past four years, and have “won” (written that many words in the month of November) the past three years. NaNoWriMo hosts similar programs in other months throughout the year, called “camps”, where you can set your own word count goals. I used one such camp to push myself and write most of *Slip*. The rest of the book I wrote shortly thereafter.

There were many challenges in writing the book, some of which I anticipated but some of which I did not expect. Even before I began writing I was well aware there would be challenges in writing a children’s book, a style of fiction which I had never done before. I am naturally a loquacious person with an extensive vocabulary, especially in my writing; writing less than usual, and in terms that elementary aged children would understand, was not something I was confident in my ability to do.

Writing the rough draft was a unique process in large part because of these considerations. I had to constantly be conscientious of my writing, double-checking my phrasing to make sure it was at a developmentally appropriate level as well as making certain that whatever I wrote was necessary for the plot, the scene, or the character. In regards to the former my background as an Elementary Education major helped me immensely. Having worked with children, engaged with children’s literature, and written

lessons with a focus on developmentally appropriate language and content in the past three and a half years I was in a good position to determine the level at which my own writing would be considered.

Other challenges made themselves known throughout the drafting process as well. Though I had planned out my plot, often I found myself in the middle of a chapter unsure of what to write. I knew where I wanted to go next, but the chapter was not yet complete, and I felt that realistically more should be happening. In these moments came some of my favorite scenes, transitional ties that I had to brainstorm and fiddle with for longer amounts of time in order to complete but which, once finished, filled out the story more completely than the bare bones of the basic plot would have. At these times I really had to push myself to write. The easy decision was to leave the text be in order to consider my options, but in those cases I often did not return to it until much later with only a few ideas about how to proceed. To avoid this I forced myself to simply write, put something on the paper, and more often than not as I did so more ideas would come and I would find myself solving the problem as it progressed. I also learned that feeling disparaged by the lack of inspiration was not something to act on; the more I wrote, the more the story progressed in a satisfactory fashion. In the end, I was simply happy that I had put something down. After all, the real forming of the story into something complete would happen in editing.

Editing the book took place in three parts: self-editing, peer editing, and mentor editing. First, before anything else, I took a short break from the work. Once the first draft was completed I set it aside, focusing on other things for a short while until I was no longer as close to it as I had been while writing. Then, when I felt that I could return to the text and



be able to view it in a more objective manner I read through it again and edited it to the best of my ability. In this process I was not only looking for grammatical and formatting errors but also the readability of the story, the flow of the plot, the depth of the characters, and how well I felt I had written those larger ideas I wished to portray subtly. I read through the book twice to this effect, until I felt that I had edited all which I, as the author, could see.

Once I felt confident that I had done all I could myself, I sent the text to a wide circle of peers, all of who have experience in creative writing and many of who are creative writing majors or minors. I also sent copies to my parents, one of who was an elementary school teacher for many years. From this group of editors I received a veritable fountain of feedback, from word-by-word editing to comments and suggestions about the plot as a whole. Taking in all this advice I looked at my story with fresh eyes, considering every editing that others had made and using most of them to better the book in every way possible. Once I had done all I could with the feedback I had received my thesis mentor edited the text, making final revisions and solidifying the book as a completed project.

These stages of editing had their own challenges, of course. Anybody who has ever undertaken a creative endeavor will admit that accepting criticism on their work is perhaps the hardest process of the entire ordeal. Some criticism is easier to accept than others. Comments on a misspelling, or a grammar suggestion once in a while, or even a comment on what might be a plot hole- these are relatively simple to deal with, especially since most of my editors were nice enough to write their comments down (and therefore I could consider the suggested revisions indirectly and with less emotion getting in the way). Revision suggestions for big events, however, or consistent grammatical conflicts that

could be considered stylistic choices were a lot more of a challenge to work through.

Needless to say I did not need to necessarily accept every revision given to me – the writing is, in the end, mine – but all the same most of them did better my writing, and coming to terms with that was a learning process all of its own.

All of the editing paid off, however, and by the time I had finished my final revisions I had a children's book I was proud to have written. All the same, having a complete story was not the end of the project. For what use is a story if it is not shared? Early on in my musings about this thesis project I had determined I would self-publish it, putting it for sale online so that anybody interested could purchase a copy of the book. I have done this before with reasonable success; for this project I used Create Space, an online self-publishing service, which not only allows me to give the book an ISBN number but to sell it on Amazon.com as well. To me, having a physical copy of the book available for purchase was the true testament to having completed the project. This came with a new set of tasks. After all, a published book cannot just be a story with nothing else: I needed a print-ready version with chapter titles, more professional fonts, a table of contents, a title page, and other such accouterments. Perhaps most importantly, I also needed a cover.

Writing is not my only hobby; I have been pursuing an interest in art for years as well. Therefore, when I considered the need for a cover for my book, it was obvious that I would draw it myself. I had been developing an idea for it for a while, one which I felt portrayed the idea of the story just as I would like it to. Drawing the cover (and then inking it, coloring it, shading it, and overall making it worthy of gracing the cover of a book through Photoshop) was a time-consuming and at times frustrating process. However, in the end I enjoyed the freedom of expression drawing the cover myself gave me, as I could

do my best to bring the image in my head to life and share it with everybody who read the book. That is not something I feel would have been possible if I had used an online cover maker or something of the sort.

Throughout the writing process I had also toyed with the idea of a glossary or guide at the back of the book, where readers could learn more about the terminology and history behind the Renaissance Faires and the actual Renaissance. This eventually evolved into the concept of a website for the novel, where readers could explore the historical basis for many of the concepts discussed in the book as well as learn more about Renaissance Faires. In order to make this a reality I created a website on Weebly, a free web hosting service. I then put the URL to this website, as well as a QR code which can be scanned and send the reader right to the website, in the back of the book. I felt this was a good idea, as it didn't take up much more space in the small novel but is still a helpful and fun web resource that readers can explore. I expect to keep developing the website into the future as I find more student-friendly historical resources and web spaces.

Overall, I am quite proud of what I have accomplished. I feel that the book is well worth publishing and I am excited to see the response it will have with a wider audience. Making the book a complete project by not only writing it, but publishing it and adding a website as well, assures me that I have created a product that will have an actual impact. If only one child reads this book and enjoys it, then I will have achieved all the lofty goals I strove for throughout this process. I hope such a thing will occur; and, thanks to my book being available for purchase on widespread web platforms such as Amazon, there is a much greater chance. In the end, I feel that I have learned quite a bit, and found success in an area

of fiction writing which I had not attempted before. I feel more confident going on now and exploring even further the boundaries of creativity.